

How to Keep Our Beaches Clean

In addition to monitoring beach water for bacteria, the Beach Program works to keep beaches clean of litter by supporting the volunteer beach cleaning efforts of the Blue Ocean Society. Volunteers clean all the coastal beaches monthly, year round. DES also works with the NH Division of Parks and Recreation to provide refuse containers for state coastal beaches.

Please, whenever you visit a beach:

- Bring a garbage bag to take home all trash you create.
- Recycle bottles and cans instead of throwing them away.
- Smokers: Put butts in a proper receptacle. Butts are made of plastic and do not decompose.
- Secure your belongings from the wind.
- DO NOT FEED THE BIRDS. Bird droppings contribute bacteria directly to the beach.
- Dog Owners: Pick up any wastes produced by your dogs. Their feces contribute bacteria directly to the beach.

**Please help us keep our beaches free from harmful organisms and litter.
A clean beach is more enjoyable for everyone!**

Contacting the Beach Program

The Beach Program is fully staffed during the summer months, and staff are usually away from the office inspecting beaches. If you are unable to reach someone immediately by phone, please leave a message or email the staff at beaches@des.nh.gov. A staff member will respond as soon as possible.

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New Hampshire's Beach Program

Healthy Swimming Through Clean Water



Hampton Beach, New Hampshire's flagship coastal beach, earned five stars for water quality from the Natural Resources Defense Council in 2008. Only 19 other beaches in the country rated as high.

A program of the New Hampshire
Department of Environmental Services.

Monitoring State Beaches

Swimming in lakes, rivers and coastal waters should be an enjoyable and safe experience. However, swimming in recreational waters may expose people to health hazards, so the N.H. Department of Environmental Services inspects the water at the public beaches. DES monitors both disease-causing pathogens and toxin producing cyanobacteria. Although reports of illnesses contracted from public beaches in state are very rare, the DES Beach Program wants the public to be aware that contact with contaminated water could cause a person to become ill.

Potential Problems

Pathogens causing diseases such as gastroenteritis or Giardiasis, can be carried in the feces of humans, waterfowl, livestock and domestic animals. The pathogens are transferred to public bathing areas when the feces from an infected warm-blooded animal enters a waterbody from nearby farms, septic systems, wildlife, storm drains or similar sources.

Cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, can form a dense layer of blue-green or bright green scum on the water's surface. Cyanobacteria may cause an entire lake to take on a blue-green hue or the blooms may resemble floating paint chips or bright green balls. Many cyanobacteria are potentially toxic to domestic animals, livestock and humans, and blooms should be avoided.

Nuisance problems caused by free-living microorganisms, like swimmer's itch, are not routinely monitored. More information on all of these issues can be found at the DES Beach Program website.

DES Beach Program Overview

The Beach Program inspectors visit approximately 180 beaches across the state each summer to sample the water for pathogens and inspect the water for algal blooms scums. Sixteen coastal beaches are sampled once or twice a week, depending on how many individuals visit the beach. Over 160 freshwater beaches are sampled once per month.

Monitoring beaches is a cooperative effort between the DES and local beach managers. DES samples and inspects the beaches, while towns, associations, or other beach owners pay for the cost of water analysis. If your beach isn't being inspected and sampled, please contact the DES for information on how to join the Beach Inspection program.



A Typical Beach Inspection

Beach inspectors collect water samples from the bathing area for bacteria analysis. Staff also inspect for indications of cyanobacteria, collecting samples if the water appears turbid or colored. Additionally, beach inspectors note the availability of restroom facilities and waste receptacles, as well as the presence of life-guards, rescue equipment and signs. Finally, the numbers of visitors, dogs and wildlife present are recorded.

Sample Analysis

Freshwater beach samples are analyzed for *E. coli* bacteria while coastal water samples are analyzed for Enterococci. Bacteria test results are available in 24 hours from the DES Lab in Concord. EPA has recently accepted a new methodology that provides bacteria results in several hours. The quicker test results mean that the public can be notified sooner of any health risks associated with recreating at any monitored beach.

Samples of possible cyanobacteria are microscopically identified by the DES Limnology staff within 24 hours.

Beach Advisories

If beach bacteria levels exceed the state's water quality standards or a blue-green algae bloom is identified, the Beach Program will contact the local beach manager. The beach manager, usually a town health officer, then posts an advisory sign at the beach. The advisory sign states that the beach may be unsafe for swimming and identifies the contaminant. Beach managers have the authority to close a particular beach if they feel it is a public health threat.

Bacteria samples are collected daily at posted beaches until bacteria levels decrease below the state standards, at which time the beach advisory is removed. Algal samples are collected weekly at posted beaches until cyanobacteria abundance decreases below 50 percent of total cells observed. Current beach advisories are posted on the DES webpage and updated daily; advisories are also posted on [www.twitter.com/NHDES_Beaches](https://twitter.com/NHDES_Beaches).